Copy of letter No.22 from Sgt. Pilot Murray [illegible]

Copy of letter No.18 from Sgt. Pilot W. M. Wilson to H.M.W.

Silloth,
2nd Jan. '42

It is twelve days since I last wrote and I really meant not to allow such a long time between letters again, but it seems that my resolutions didn't amount to much. As it is I have about an hour and a half before I have to do a bit of Link so I will at least get this started.
At lunch time I collected three letters - from you, Mother and Jean. Somehow I had an idea I'd get a letter, I went along to the mess and just asked as if I was sure there was something for me, and sure enough there was. It was No.18 written 30-31 Sept. and even though I've had much later ones from you it didn't make the slightest difference.
Saturday 3rd. I didn't get far yesterday, it is almost impossible to write in the hut, there is always a lot of talk and chatter going on there, so now I am trying to get going in the mess but its not much better here.
I think I told you that our course is mostly Aussies - we should get ten crews and the rest are locals and Canadians. I am again the only Aussie Sgt. Pilot but there are two English chaps too and they are good fellows.
We are in the hut with the Wireless Op/Air Gunners of our course - about 25 in the hut altogether - the accommodation is only fair. They build their huts with the ceilings far too low here and it is so cold that it is all boxed up at night and the air gets pretty stale by morning. However, it is good to be in with the gunners as our crews come from them and it gives us a chance to get acquainted before we crew up in about three weeks I think.
Beds are good with decent mattresses and sheets so that is a big help. There aren't enough lockers to go around and as I came along after all the gunners had arrived I haven't got one but will have next Tuesday when a couple of strays we've got with us leave. They are good lockers too - steel with three drawers and hanging space, they are much like a lowboy.
There are two stoves in the hut and they are kept going continuously and they need to be too - I don't know what we'd do without them. I use one to dry my boots at at night also overcoat sometimes, without them it would be impossible to h ve dry things and as it is we all have rotten colds.
Which brings us to the weather. Its lousy. Last week it was bitterly cold - one day the temp. rose to a max. of a couple of degrees above freezing and then only for an hour and a bit, for the rest of the day and the previous night it stayed well below freezing and we almost froze with it..It is a damp cold which works the same as a damp heat and the Canadians - used to their 30 and 40 below in a dry cold - feel it more than the locals and as much as we do. The whole place is always wet, it seems as if a lot of the rain comes in a drizzle and although the annual fall is about the same as Perth it is much more spread out - like Melbourne, only worse. The last couple of days it has hardly stopped at all - intermittant rain and drizzle and the soil is very clayey and boggy. The only time it is possible to keep shoes dry is when the ground and water are frozen, then you just walk over it and it crackles under your feet but of course it is dry.
This sounds like a moan and I suppose it is, but I know you are interested in how things are here so I'll continue a bit further. Cold showers in the morning are out of the question, althoug on Xmas. morning I did have one. but the water is really far too cold. We have hot water of course but it is only there sometimes, apparently someone is too lazy to keep the boiler going but we can get a hot bath or shower - yes, for a wonder they do have showers - but not every day, only when the water is hot - about three or four times a week. As far as I can see there are very few people here who bath more than once a week and they think we are a bit silly to do so.
The meals are jolly good and also it is not going to be such an expensive place as the 1st. I think the main thing about that is that here we live on the Station and there we slept out and messed at the hotel and worked at the Station. Another thing is that the beer isn't much good here so we rarely drink it whereas before we got around quite alot.

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The weather isn't much good for flying but we have got in quite a bit and these kites are great. I'm sure I am going to like them very much. They handle very well and are good to fly. They are certainly too slow and they've one or two other drawbacks - I'd better not say things I shouldn't - but one can't have everything and I'll be happy flying them.
The old nav. ticket came good which pleased me muchly. It is rather decent to have it and is something tangible after all the nav. we have done. I won't get in much nav. practice from now on - I'll get what I can but will have very little opportubity. Still X I'll keep my hand in as much as possible. Anyhow I know that you will pleased that I have got it and that means a great deal to me.
Xmas. has come and gone, xxix also New Year.
Sunday 4th.Was interrupted again last night but it is somehting to have got going for three successive days. Last night I rambled on about this place before I told you about the wonderful part of Xmas. Day. As you probably know there was a lot of work done in England on Xmas. day, but we had the day off, and I wandered into the mess about 11 o'clock in the morning and found my name on the "parcel list". I had given up all hope of anything arriving by Xmas. day, by then of course, but your cake was waiting for me. Strange that it should arrive on Xmas. day and it just "made" my Xmas. It seemed a little bit as if you had just brought it out and given it to me yourself - that is how I thought of it. So you see my dear I actually got a present from my wife right on the day.
If you knew the pleasure it gave me to have a cake from you and right at the psychological time too - well it was simply wonderful. I didn't open it straight away - meant to keep it until after tea but couldn't wait that long and opened it after dinner but just had a look at it then - but had some for supper. It tasted wonderful - I should say tastes as there is still a little bit left - and you can be sure that I was pretty popular with it. Some of the others had cakes but none of them were in the race with mine. Such a big one too - I took it out of the tin and cut it in two sideways and then cut the top half before the bottom, it made good sized slices like that. Of course it kept perfectly. Anyhow thank you ever so much for it - it made all the difference to my Xmas.
Otherwise the day was pretty quiet, we went into Silloth in the morning - or rather at about 12 and had a few drinks and then back here for dinner. The Air Force put on a decent sort of a spread including turkey. A bit of a snooze after dinner and more grog in the evening and in bed by 11 and that was Xmas. We worked on New Years Day and I didn't realize that it had come until it had nearly gone. It is hard to keep track of the days here - we work on Sundays but at present get Mondays off.
Some of us went into Carlisle last Monday - its 22 miles away and a fair sized town - and I bought me a suitcase. I got heartily sick of my things in kit bags. It is not a very good one, they are terribly expensive here now and even then hard to get. Anything decent cost three or four quid.
The Aust. Comforts Fund came good - I got a parcel a couple of days ago, nearly missed it too, the Chaplain here handed them out. It has a tin of fruit, cream, sugar, cake, choc. and toothpaste - it is jolly nice and I haven't touched it yet.
I think I will send this by boat mail to give it a try and you can tell me how long it takes.

Received 21st. April, 1942.

Copy of letter No.22 from Sgt. Pilot Murray Wilson to H.M.W.

26th.March 1942.

I'm in Edinburgh now dear and have just been to see the Sinclairs. We have a night here on the way through so of course I rang them as soon as we arrived here, the train got in at about 7.15 and we booked in at the Royal Hotel in Princes Street and then had a bath, shave etc. then tea and then out to see them.
They are a great family and I have promised to stay with them when I get some more leave. Elizabeth brought out a whole lot of snaps that Constance has sent her at various times and she told me the news of her latest letters. I just had a couple of hours with them as I didn't get out till after nine, but I was jolly glad to be able to meet them and I think they were pleased to see me Elizabeth's sister - forget her name - (Anna who is very lovely and married to an Englishman in the Air Force, H.M.W.) wasn't home, but the others were, I suppose I was a bit lucky that they weren't all out as of course I couldn't tell them that I was coming before I did.
Yesterday we went from London to Norwich and stayed the night there in some damned broken down sort of a boarding house that calls itself an hotel. It is run by the usual boarding house type of woman who informed us that we couldn't have a bath as they only allowed their guests one bath a week and anyway casuals couldn't have one at all. It was that sort of a dump. However it was only for a night so we survived it but it was a bit of a comedown from the Strand Palace that we had just come from.
We came from Norwich to Edinburgh today and had quite a good trip. This Hotel is quite a nice place and I am looking forward to a decent snooze when I've finished this. I should have started by telling you where we are going instead of saying it bit by bit. We're off to Stornaway and that is in the Isle of Lewis about the most godforsaken joints of all the godforsaken joints that ever were. I forget whether I said before that we were going to Horsham St. Faith - near Norwich - or Bircham Newton. Anyhow we were told to go to them both in turn and then finished up with Stornaway so I won't see Rae unless we get called back as we may do but it is not very likely.
We went to Norwich to fix up our luggage which we had previously sent there. Tomorrow we continue the journey and go to Inverness and beyond that we have not worked out what happens. I would never have thought such a long drawn out journey was possible here, but the big advantage is that we are getting a decent sleep each night and then travelling in the day time, we worked it out that way to suit ourselves - I believe we were due there two days ago but it will be a couple of days hence before we arrive.
We had a great week in London - didn't go to any more theatres after the two I told you of but saw a couple of picture shows. One day we all got together in Australia House and decided to go out to see the Science Museum - it is supposed to be very interesting - but when we got there after a lot of bother finding it, we discovered it had been closed since the beginning of the war, or so we were told. Anyway it was certainly shut then, but still we saw a bit of London we hadn't seen before.
On Sunday night I went out to see Madge and Keith Cummings and took them some sugar and some tea. There was another chap there too - Ron Weston a West. Aust. chap who was in England when the war broke out so he joined the R.A.F. It was nice to see them again.
In my rush of telling you what I'm doing I didn't even tell you that I had another letter from you. It was waiting for me at Horsham - No.28 and was such a lovely surprise for me. I didn't expect any mail there, but got your letter just as we had finished lunch.
This is just a short letter to tell you how things are going so goodnight.

Received 6th. June, 1942.

Letter No 21 not yet rcd.

Copy of letter No.19 from Sgt. Pilot W.M.Wilson to H.M.W.

Silloth,
18th. January, 1942.

Your ordinary air mail letters are catching up now - yesterday I got No.13 so that now I have got all up to 20 except 16 and 18. Now that the Clipper has stopped they are filling in the gap which would otherwise be there.
Monday 19th. I am sorry that this letter is such a long time after the last one, but even in this first half page I have stopped twice and now this is the third attempt. I am definitely going to make some progress this time.
It is now 10 a.m. and I am still in bed - it is my day off today - and for the moment at any rate I've got the hut on my own. I am writing lying down with my head on the pillow and pad beside, it is more comfy than I thought it would be, but if my writing is more unreadable than usual you'll know why. I've got my red cardigan on to keep my arm warm.
Yesterday afternoon I got another letter from you - it was No.18. I do feel pretty badly about my letters to you - there just aren't enough ofthem. If there was a nice quiet spot where I could go when I wanted to write I would get so many more written but there isn't. We have just the mess and the hut and they are both very rowdy. I want to write to you but it is difficult to get around to it.
This afternoon I am going into Carlisle and I have some snaps to collect. There are some of London amongst them, including some taken of the stage of the Prince of Wales Theatre. I forget whether I mentioned to you that I went to a show there with Tommy and took some snaps. The only other time I tried was on our previous - rather first - visit to London, when I took some snaps at the Palladium, but it was on slow film and not much good. This time I had fast - Super XX film in the camera and I am rather hopeful. I'll send you what good ones there are.
I haven't yet got around to telling you that yesterday I got eight letters and your cable. It was a great surprise to find such a pile there and thanks so much for your cable. It told me - as well as that you had had a letter of mine and you had sent me some - that you are at Carnarvon. I do hope that you are enjoying it and had a good trip up. I'm afraid that the trip is rather tough and very tiring but I hope it was as good as possible. Nodoubt you have Judith with you and are going to stay for some time. It will be decent for you to be with them all for a while and nice for the nips too.
Tuesday 20th. Yesterday was quite a big day. I got up in time for a bath etc. before dinner and at the mess I found four of the lads from Geraldton. I don't think I have mentioned these chaps to you before. Ted McKinnon and Alan Moyle and Col. Veal (from Northampton) and Dudley Dyson. They had come the previous night by plane and had the day here - in fact they are still here. It was great having the day off with them.
Wewent into Carlisle at 2 p.m. and went from there to Gretna by bus - it is only a few miles from Carlisle - just over the border. When we left Carlisle it was snowing a bit and when we reached Gretna there was quite a bit of snow on the ground and it was coming down more heavily although it was really sleet and so rather wet.
However, when we got out of the bus it was very cold - a strong wind was blowing which made it colder - and the first thing we did was to find an eating house. Gretna is only a little village but we found a decent tearooms and had some tucker and then out into the snow and wind again.
There was a lot of snow on the ground by this time and we had a lot of fun with a running snow fight along the street. We were off to see the famous Smithy's Shop and his anvil. Its about a quarter of an hours walk from where we were and by the time we got there we were quite warm, but the Smithy's shop was shut so we had to be content with a look through the window. We took some snaps and bought some postcards, and then back to the bus.
The snow was holding up traffic so the bus was late and we walked along and Ifound a pub on the track and had a few grogs before it came along. The rest of the boys were staying in Carlisle for the night, but I had to get back. I could have got back here in the early morning but it is 22 miles and would have been a lot of trouble, so after having some tea I caught the train home. It was a darned good day and we all enjoyed it immensely. It was our first experience of snow and we had a lot of fun in it. Also it was decent for me to meet up with them again and get all the news of the boys.
When I got back here it had been snowing very heavily and was still doing so and there was six or eight inches on the ground. The Canadians even said it was "real snow". Not as much of it as they get of course but it was a heavy fall for England, especially near the coast.
Next morning when we could see it really looked beautiful and I have taken a couple more snaps. It is still with us and snowing again today and it will probably be around for some time yet.

P.T.O.

It is very cold but we get well rugged up. At the moment I have three pairs of socks on and rubber knee boots also two pullovers. It is really very nice to see the snow and I am glad we are having some and there is no need to be cold if you look after yourself - and you may be quite sure that I do. While in Carlisle I got my last lot of snaps and there are a few good ones among them too. I am rather pleased with the theatre ones and also one I took in a fog in Regents Park, London. I'll send them.
I only got to the end of page 7 yesterday and have continued on from there today. I carry my pad around and write when I get the chance.
Tonight another lad and I are going visiting. One of the English lads here has his wife in Silloth and he has asked us to spend the evening with them. He's a good sort and I am looking forward to it.

Received 9th. April 1942.

Postcard of Gretna Green dated 23/1/42 - received 9/4/42.

Have just received your wonderful parcel, also your two cables from Carnarvon. Thank you for all the things you have sent me. It was just a marvellous parcel. Mother's came at the same time also a cable saying "parcel received" At that rate you won't have got yours yet but I hope its not very long reaching you now.
I'll get in touch with Elizabeth Sinclair straight away. Nodoubt you will write and tell me later who she is but for the time it is enough to know that she is receiving my letters. It is a great idea as the Air Force is much too lax about mail and it is delayed a terribly long time here.

M.W.

Copy of Letter No.6 from Sgt. Pilot Murray Wilson.

Halifax,
22nd. August, 1941.

We've been strutting around on dry land for a few days now and have we enjoyed it? We've seen most of what there is to see about Halifax, but its not much of a dump and I for one won't be sorry to get away but any town anywhere, would have seemed decent to us after our spell at sea. We've been around the shops and bought up a few things that we needed - most of the boys found that they had forgottenx something, and we've been all around the town and nearby spots and now consider that we know quite a bit about the local scenery.

Nova Scotia is officially dry - or nearly so. All beer etc,, is sold by the Liquor Commission and it can only be consumed at home - if you've got one. The Hotels - still called by that high sounding name - are dry with the result that all except a couple of them are most unpretentious and not at all inviting. The two exceptions the Nova Scotia Hotel and the Lord Nelson are beautiful buildings but we are not very interested in them.

We have the run of the local barracks mess and it is truly amazing the number of different uniforms seen there. Its the meeting place for everyone and of course about the one place where beer can be sold without hindrance. One of the lads and I were there a couple of days ago and a local Sgt. Major joined in the conversation and then showed us around. We spent the afternoon with him and learnt a lot of the history of Halifax as well as a lot of his own personal history, and then he dashed away for a minute and when he came back told us that he'd just rung his wife and we were going back to tea with him. It was very nice too.

His wife turned on a wonderful spread for us and then apologised for the scrappy dinner - or supper as they call it. We spent the evening there doing nothing inn particular - just talking, and kept them up until after twelve, they insisted that they never went to bed before one. We got a bit envious when he brought out his snow shoes, skates and skis to show us and then told us of all the holidays they had had. Of course they don't have t to travel beyond their back door step to get all the snow and ice they want in the winter time.

I posted a pair of slippers for you and Judy dear, they seemed a bit unusual as is of seal skin. I hope they fit you both. Yours are size 4 - they say that the lasts here are one size smaller than English and Australian so that should be right. I hope so. I would like to get something for Mother too but haven't been able to think of anything.

I got some photos developed here too and some are pretty good but some are not so good. Vern. - I mentioned him before, the lad who knows the game - tells me that the negatives are pretty clear and sharp and that it is bad printing that has messed some up. Anyhow I'll get other prints later. I'm not too keen to try again here as they charge too much.

They charge too much for everything in fact, and our pound is worth just under three and a half dollars so we pay through the neck twice over. Its impossible to get a decent meal under three or four shillings and a malted milk costs tenpence. By the way I don't think I mentioned that I was unable to send any money on but had to carry it with me. Its no weight to carry round and I really think it is the best thing to do although I should have brought some sterling with me, it would have been handy. Still we do alright

Saturday 23rd. August. I solved the problem of the morning shaver a long time ago, but I don't think I mentioned having done so. I would have been pickled by now if I'd been on salt baths all this time. There are only a

a few of us who are on t it but its very nice. I suppose I will have to revise my ideas about the shower when it gets too cold. I'm not tough enough to get under it when the temp is much below our own inter level and its sure going to be.
We have been to a couple of picture shows here but they have got funny ideas about how to show them. They run continuously from one to eleven p.m. and only last two hours. That means that there are two evening shows, one from seven till nine and one from nine to eleven. We all decided it was a lousy idea. The price is three and eightpence. (the slide rule is very handy to work out dollars to pounds) Still it passes the time and it was quite a change to see a show.
Last night the had a street dance and I believe it was quite a good show - novel for our chaps anyhow. I didn't get there as I was working. I landed another job for the night - I shouldn't have had it and could most ~~xxx~~ likely ~~xxx~~ have talked my way out of it but I didn't mind doing it and most likely saved a bit of coin. One street was barricaded off and a stage was erected for the orchestra and the crowd stood outside the barricade and got inside for ten Cents a dance. Bob gave me a description of it and he said the Mounties were there complete with red jackets and spurs. Everything is jitterbug here - they don't know anything else. In some inexplicable way they seem to be able to work it into a waltz too and they say that we dance the English style. A few of us went to a dance the other night but I for one found it a bit beyond me. A lot of the others say the same
I h ve got a letter half written to Mother and it is three weeks since I last wrote to her. I didn't mean to leave it so long so I must get it finished and posted with this. Also I want to write to Jean for her birthday but may h ve to rely on a cable. I will write to her but it'll reach her after her birthday.

Received 6th. October 1941 by boat mail.

Copy of Letter No. 5 from Sgt. Pilot Murray Wilson.

Mon. 11th. August '41

It is now a week since I last wrote to you - or anyone else for that matter - but it is rather exasperating to be doing rather interesting things and not be able to tell you about them. We had a day in port yesterday and got ashore for a couple of hours. It was the first feel of dry land we'd had for ages and I can tell you it was very welcome. This ship is nice and roomy and quite comfortable , but by the time we reach our ultimate destination, we are going to be heartily sick of it.

Things are not as we expected - not at all - haven't seen a decent sized wave yet, although we have had our little moan about the weather. Its been stinking hot. A lot of the boys have been sleeping on deck to get away from the heat and stuffiness below. Had a go at it myself a couple of times, but our cabib is not too bad and it is a lot of bother lugging mattresses etc., around the place and now it has cooled off a bit, I don't think I'll be doing it any more. I was most surprised to find out that the temperature of the sea water was 84 degrees a few days ago. When I was on the "Cooks Tour" job of the engine room, I got a bit friendly with one of the engineers down there and he's told me quite a bit about it all. The lowest temp. we got down to was 34 degrees. With such hot water around us the ship has been a bit stifling. However we have always got the swimming pool although of course thats pretty warm too.

The old blackout job is not bad at all this weather. I've been on the shifts up till midnight all the time so far and quite often it made no difference being on or off duty. We would be on deck in any case. It is pleasant to sit out on the deck or wander around these nights, but it will be a different tale when it starts to get cold again. Still I've plenty of togs to keep me warm.

Our little jaunt ashore yesterday was great. It was a funny little spot we called in at and the town - a funny little spot too - was about ten miles away. Our money was no good, but everyone managed to get a bit of the local coin and see the town - plenty of taxis to take us there - and get back to the ship again - tired, but darn glad of the break and very pleased to have seen it all. A few days before that we had a most interesting day but the rules of the game won't let me tell you of it. We stopped for a while but didn't get any leave - bad show.

We had to hand our cameras in a week ago and haven't got them back yet. I'd have loved to have had it yesterday, there was miles of material for some decent pictures - but no camera.

Later. Wednesday, 13th. Well, it is still just the same old round of things and not much to tell you. Yesterday was as hot as the very devil and the night was stifling. I was on blackout from 12 till 2 and the deck was the only place that was at all comfortable - even there it was pretty warm. The cabin - with the prthole closed - was not much good for sleeping, but I stayed there from 2 o'clock onwards as the lads on deck get shot off very early in the morning by the crew scrubbing down the deck, and at six Bob opened the porthole and I slept until nearly nine so came out of it pretty well.

I just got the camera back, so I'll get soje more snaps. I haven't been able to get any printed yet, but got a few developed and the negatives look quite good. When I get something decent I'll send it to you.

We seem to spend most of the day reading now, of course I've got a few books there and could do some swot, but I'd be very much alone and anyhow I don't feel like it. Its a bit hard to concentrate on board ship so I'm not trying, although I've read up quite a bit about photography. At our first port after the big stretch at sea the local Y.M.C.A. came good with a lot of magazines.